

What is extreme heat?

An Extreme Heat Emergency is when daytime and nighttime temperatures get hotter every day and are well above seasonal norms.

Extreme heat is dangerous for the health and wellbeing of our communities and is responsible for the highest number of weather-related deaths annually.

In 2021 alone, the BC Coroners Service attributed 595 deaths to the extreme heat event that occurred between June 25 and July 1. Most of those deaths resulted from excessive indoor temperatures in private residences.

Climate change connection

B.C. is experiencing higher annual summer temperatures and more extremely hot days due to climate change. Western Canada is already on average one to two degrees warmer than it was in the 1940s (source: Canada in a Changing Climate; Government of Canada).

This trend increases the likelihood for more extreme heat events like the heat dome experienced in 2021, making it more critical for people to understand the risk, prepare for these conditions, and know where to access support.

Identify those who are at risk

While everyone can benefit from planning and preparing for extreme heat emergencies, the following people are especially at-risk if they do not have access to air conditioning and need to be prepared and supported:

- seniors aged 65 years or older
- people who live alone
- people with pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or respiratory disease
- people with mental illness such as schizophrenia, depression, or anxiety
- people with substance use disorders
- people who are marginally housed
- people who work in hot environments
- people who are pregnant
- infants and young children
- people with limited mobility

Make plans

If you live alone, and need extra help, pick someone to check in on you when temperatures rise. They could take you to cooling centres, or help with cooling measures in your residence.

Can you stay at home?

If you are at risk and you live in a building or residence that gets very hot, with sustained internal temperatures of 31 degrees or higher, plan to go elsewhere during an Extreme Heat Emergency.

What are your home's cool zones?

During an Extreme Heat Emergency, you should prepare to stay in the coolest part of your residence and focus on keeping that one location cool.

Start by identifying a room that's typically coolest and consider how you can modify the layout to support sleeping and day-to-day living for the duration of the heat event.

Community locations

Identify places in your community you can visit to get cool, such as:

- libraries
- community centres
- shopping malls
- religious centres
- parks and other shaded green spaces

You can also contact your First Nation or local government to find where cooling centres will be stood up in your area.

Prepare your home

A few modifications to your home can make a big difference during periods of extreme heat. Pick and chose from the list below based on your needs. Even one or two things can help.

Indoors:

- Install a window air conditioner in at least one room
- Install thermal curtains or window coverings
- Keep digital thermometers available to accurately measure indoor temperatures (31 degrees or higher is dangerous for vulnerable people)
- Have fans available to help move cooler air indoors during the late evening and early morning hours
- [Install a heat pump](#)

Tip: Fans cannot effectively reduce body temperatures or prevent heat-related illness in people at risk. Do not rely on fans as your primary cooling method during an Extreme Heat Emergency.

Outdoors:

- Install exterior covers or reflective films that block the sun from hitting the windows. This can be as simple as applying cardboard to the outside of the window

Tip: Uncovered windows can increase the internal heat of your home by 2 to 3 degrees.

As temperatures rise

Pay attention to the media, [Environment Canada](#), [Emergency Info BC](#) and your health authority for more information about Heat Warnings and Extreme Heat Emergencies.

Heat alert levels

Alert	Threat	Action
Heat Warning	Daytime and overnight temperatures are higher than seasonal norms and holding steady.	Take usual steps to stay cool.
Extreme Heat Emergency	Daytime and overnight temperatures are higher than seasonal norms and getting hotter every day.	Activate your emergency plan.

You can do this by following the trusted sources below:

Environment Canada

- Website: <https://weather.gc.ca/>
- Twitter: [@ECCCWeatherBC](#)

HealthLink BC

- Website: www.healthlinkbc.ca/

BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC)

- Website: bccdc.ca
- Twitter: [@CDCofBC](#)

First Nations Health Authority

- Website: fnha.ca
- Twitter: [@FNHA](#)
- Facebook: [firstnationshealthauthority](#)

Regional Health Authorities

- [Fraser Health](#)
- [Interior Health](#)
- [Island Health](#)
- [Northern Health](#)
- [Vancouver Coastal Health](#)

Emergency Info BC

- Website: emergencyinfobc.gov.bc.ca
- Twitter: [@emergencyinfobc](https://twitter.com/emergencyinfobc)

Health Canada

- Website: canada.ca/en/public-health
- Twitter: [@GovCanHealth](https://twitter.com/GovCanHealth)
- Twitter: [@CPHO_Canada](https://twitter.com/CPHO_Canada)
- Facebook: [HealthyCdns](https://www.facebook.com/HealthyCdns)

Activate your plan to stay cool

If an Extreme Heat Emergency has been issued, it's time to put your plan into action:

- Relocate to a cooler location if you have planned to do so
- Reconfigure the coolest location in your home so you can sleep there at night
- Check in with your pre-identified heat buddy. If you don't have one, reach out
- Put up external window covers to block the sun if you can safely do so
- Close your curtains and blinds
- Ensure digital thermometers have batteries
- Make ice and prepare jugs of cool water
- Keep windows closed between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. Open them at 8 p.m. to allow cooler air in, and use fans (including kitchen and bathroom exhaust fans) to move cooler air through the house

During the heat event

In homes without air conditioning, heat builds indoors over the course of a few days. It may stay hotter inside than outside overnight. Without air conditioning, the longer the heat lasts, the more dangerous it becomes.

Take the following steps to keep yourself and members of your household safe.

Stay cool inside

- If you have air conditioning, turn it on. It does not need to be going full strength to help you stay safe
- If you have air conditioning, and friends and family do not, bring them to your home
- If you do not have air conditioning, move to your pre-identified alternate location with air conditioning or cooler spaces
- Sleep in the coolest room of your residence. If it's cooler outside, sleep outside when feasible
- Sleep with a wet sheet or in a wet shirt
- Take cool baths or showers to draw heat from your body
- Drink plenty of water, regardless of whether you feel thirsty. Be aware that sugary or alcoholic drinks cause dehydration

- If you are taking medication or have a health condition, ask your doctor or pharmacist if it increases your health risk in the heat and follow their recommendation
- If your doctor limits the amount you drink or has you on water pills, ask how much you should drink when the weather is hot.

Stay cool outside

- Lower your activity level
- If you must do errands, do them early or late in the day
- Never leave children or pets in a parked car
- Avoid direct sun by staying in the shade and wearing a hat and protective clothing
- Use sunscreen and UV-protective eyewear
- Seek cooler, breezier areas when outdoors, such as large parks near to trees and water
- If you work in a hot environment, discuss and act on ways to decrease heat exposure with your employer and coworkers.

Pets: Make sure you have lots of fresh water for your pets and that they are in cool locations. Stay in shady areas and avoid asphalt and pavement; those surfaces can burn paws.

Getting too hot

Overheating can be harmful to your health and potentially deadly. If you're experiencing symptoms, such as rapid breathing and heartbeat, extreme thirst, and decreased urination with unusually dark yellow urine, take immediate steps to cool down and seek emergency care.

- Get medical attention or call 911
- Submerge yourself or the person you're helping in cool water
- Remove clothes and apply wet cloths

Heat stroke is an emergency. Call 911 or your local emergency number if you are caring for someone who displays symptoms, then take immediate action to cool them down while waiting for help to arrive.

Extreme heat and wildfire

Extreme heat can lead to periods of drought and a higher risk of wildfires. For most people, exposure to extreme heat is a bigger risk to health than exposure to wildfire smoke. If you cannot get cool inside, go outside even if there is smoke.

- Visit [BC wildfire service](#) for current wildfire activity, prevention activities, and fire bans and restrictions
- Visit [Prepared BC wildfires](#) for how to get prepared for a wildfire
- Visit [BC CDC wildfire smoke page](#) for the health impacts of wildfire smoke